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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 005372

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH MILF CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Classified By: (U) Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Paul W. Jones
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) Summary. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leaders received a strong message on November 15 from embosfs that the MILF must permanently cut all contacts with terrorist organizations. MILF Vice Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jafaar claimed the MILF remained fully committed to the peace process and promised to brief the MILF Central Committee on US concerns about terrorist safe havens and training in MILF areas. The next step is up to the MILF to demonstrate its will to cut these institutional and/or personal ties with terrorists. End Summary.

CLEAR MESSAGE: CUT MILF TIES WITH TERRORISTS

12. (C/NF) Poloffs and RSO met for the first time with MILF Vice Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jafaar on November 15 at the MILF's Peace Negotiations Headquarters in Sultan Kudurat City, Maguindanao Province, Mindanao. Present with Jafaar were MILF Central Committee members Jun Mantawil, Bobby Mulana Alonto, Muhammad Ameen, and Khalifa Nando. After expressing USG support for the GRP-MILF peace process under the sponsorship of the Government of Malaysia and readiness to extend development assistance to the MILF in the event of a final peace agreement, embosfs delivered a strong message to Jafaar that all elements of the MILF must permanently cut all contacts with terrorist organizations, including training activities. They also advised Jafaar to work closely with the GRP through the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group to bring Khadaffy Janjalani, Dulmatin, Umar Patek, and other wanted terrorists to justice.

KJ AND HAPILON DEAD?!?

13. (C/NF) Jafaar -- who welcomed the opening of a direct dialogue with the Embassy -- asserted that the MILF has been complying with the provisions of its cease-fire agreement with the GRP. As evidence, Jafaar cited the MILF's temporary withdrawal from positions in Maguindanao during July and August to facilitate the pursuit of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leaders by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Jafaar claimed to have received "credible information" that Khadaffy Janjalani and Isnilon Hapilon were "neutralized" during this operation, leaving Abu Solaiman as the only ASG leader at large. Jafaar pointed to a recent press interview with Janjalani's mother in Basilan in which she claimed her son was dead. Jafaar conceded, however, that the MILF lacked hard evidence to confirm the deaths of either Janjalani and Hapilon. (Note: Embosfs reacted skeptically to the claim. According to reliable sources, Khadaffy Janjalani and Isnilon Hapilon both remain alive and at large. End note.)

14. (C/NF) When Jafaar contended to have no knowledge of the current whereabouts of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members Dulmatin and Umar Patek, embosfs informed him that the USG had reliable information that JI operatives continued to operate and conduct training in MILF-controlled areas. Jafaar pledged that the MILF leadership would not do anything to jeopardize peace negotiations, since a peace agreement for the Moro people finally appeared to be at hand.

PLEDGE TO BRIEF CENTRAL COMMITTEE ON U.S. CONCERNS

15. (C/NF) Embosfs informed Jafaar of the multi-million dollar rewards currently being offered for Janjalani, Solaiman, Hapilon, Dulmatin, and Patek under the US Rewards for Justice Program, emphasizing the importance the USG placed upon seeing the MILF take concrete action against terrorists in its areas. Jafaar noted our points, saying the MILF did not want any "hindrances" to the peace process. He said he "understood the seriousness" of US concerns and pledged to brief the full MILF Central Committee on our demarche.

TALKS WITH COTABATO MAYOR AND IMT HEAD

16. (C/NF) In separate meetings on November 16, Emboffs also raised US concerns about the presence of terrorists in MILF areas with Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema and International Monitoring Team (IMT) Commander MG Dato Pahlawan Soheimi Bin Abbas. Sema, who claimed one of his informants had identified a JI/ASG safe house in the Linguasan Marsh for the AFP during an anti-terrorism operation earlier this year, pledged to work closely with Philippine and US officials to track any terrorists moving through Cotabato City. MG Soheimi noted that, while the ASG fell outside his official purview, he had in meetings with individual MILF commanders urged them to cut any ties with and support for terrorist organizations.

COMMENT

17. (C/NF) While this first meeting with MILF leaders was cordial, their lack of candor about the presence of Janjalani and other terrorists in MILF areas was disappointing. Nonetheless, Jafaar should now understand more fully the unambiguous nature of US concerns and requests to sever its links -- institutional or personal -- with terrorists. The next step is up to the MILF leadership to demonstrate clearly it is doing so, especially by reining in its field commanders (e.g., Wahid Tundok and Umbril Kato) who have maintained such links.

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